Co-Founder Roger Pocock was Gentleman Adventurer . . .

Frontiersmen Carry On Tr

IN THEIR JAUNTY Stetsons, spick and span blue tunics, khaki breeches and high Strathcona boots, Victoria's 30-odd Frontiersmen are often mistaken for Mounties when they help out in traffic control on the city's high days and holidays.

Few know, however, that these Mountie-type auxiliaries, who wear distinguishing chain mail epaulets, put themselves at the disposal of the city police without thought of recompense. It's all part of being a Frontiersman, part of the code of this Commonwealth-wide organization founded 55 years ago by a lean and rangy soldier of fortune called Roger Pocock, who, in his fantastic rolling stone career filled in on a rail gang, before he was bell hop, newspaperman, logger, photographer, Arctic explorer and sailor. In between he was also a soldier, policeman, poacher and Anglican missionary, and still had time to write five books and two plays, before he took to being a sculptor!

Born in England 94 years ago, Pocock had a rootless childhood; his father, an impoverished half-pay RN captain (for a time he commanded the boys' training ship "Wellesley"), kept moving on to likelier pastures. Which is why, at 16, young Roger had lived in the Channel Islands, Bombay, Southsea, New Zealand and back to England, to Ludlow (in Shropshire) where he attended school, before moving on again to Shields and Norwood.

He left school at an early age to become a junior clerk in the Atlantic Cable Station on the coast of Cornwall, but when the family moved again, this time to Quebec, he got another office job with an insurance company in Montreal. But apparently not for long.

In 1883—at 18—he was tamping ties on the construction of the CPR around the north shore of Lake Superior, and getting first-hand experience of Irish and Italian gangs, fighting it out with pick handles and knives. In the background bootleggers surreptitiously plied firewater.

Moving on to Nipigon, from there he hiked to Port Arthur, where in mid-winter he hauled fence rails over frozen forest trails by horse sleigh, waited on table in a bug-ridden construction workers' hotel, chopped the well free of ice daily and cleaned spittoons.

"I had experience of 28 trades and never learned one of them," is the way he summed it up in after life.

LATER HE TEAMED up with an alcoholically-inclined itinerant photographer to learn something of photography, and as a book peddler ("The Life of Queen Victoria") learned something of salesmanship.

Finally, by way of Thunder Bay and Duluth, he landed in Winnipeg the first week of November, 1884. Broke, he spotted a uniformed sentry outside Osborne Barracks and promptly became Regtl. No. 1107, Const. Roger Pocock, Northwest Mounted Police. They didn't become Royal until 1905.

Offhand and carefree, only thing that distinguished Pocock's police career (although he served during the Second Riel Rebellion) was when he got his feet frozen, and on another occasion nearly burned down the barracks.!

Invalided on account of his feet, he was given a civil service job in Ottawr, but a year later, restless and 21, he travelled west to Kamloops, B.C. In the back of his mind was the latent desire to prove successful at something, and it was here for the first time that he toyed with the idea of riding a horse to Mexico. Not only toyed with it, but actually started. Sixteen miles out of Kamloops his horse piled him, and he suffered a broken arm and mild concussion.

Recuperating in hospital he read in a coast paper of the "Skeena River War." It wasn't really a war, just a bunch of Hazelton Indians had decided to deny the existence of the white man's government. Pocock saw himself as a war correspondent and got himself accredited by wire to a Montreal newspaper. No advance came with the commission, so he journeyed down to Victoria and offered his services to the Anglican Church as a lay missionary on the Skeena. This way he could get to the "front."

On parade, officers and non-commissioned officers of the Frontiersmen here are, right to left: Capt. Harold Ker, officer commanding; Lieut. Jesse Green, second in command; Lieut. Ken Green, RSM Link Foulger, Cpl. William Adamus, Staff Sgt. Ray Wright, and beyond, Frontiersmen R. Well and Vincent Elliott.

By the time this was arranged, although Pocock didn't know it, the war was over. Only casualty was an Indian called Kitwancool Jim, shot dead by Prov. Const. Green. Which might have been satisfactory in a TV western but didn't suit stern superintendent of B.C. Police, H. B. Roycroft, who steered the trigger-happy constable in front of a judge at the Nanaimo Fall Assize.

Legal minds needn't worry about the offence being at Hazelton and the trial at Nanaimo . . . early day courts were streamlined. Anyway Green was pleading not guilty about the time Pocock left for the north on the "Cariboo Fly."

AFTER A SPELL on the Skeena, Pocock returned to Victoria to become a newspaperman, and searching for provocative and timely features journeyed up the east coast as far as Alert Bay with a surveyor in a canoe. He attended Indian potlatches and dances, talked to chiefs, heard about secret societies and in general probed the customs and habits of the savages. It struck him as he did so that they were getting a jug-handled deal from the whites in general and the federal Indian department in particular.

When he put his advanced ideas in print he got in bad with everyone, especially the Indian department.

Next he turned his mind to seal poaching on the Alaskan coast and offered to go as seaman with Capt. C. E. Hansen on the schooner "Adele." Hansen, the "Flying Dutchman," couldn't be bothered with the double threat in the way of an inquisitive Englishman who was also a newspaperman. He was more than annoyed when Pocock appeared out of the Adele's foc-sle when they were off Flattery, . . . having stowed away! However, a peace offering in the shape of a bottle of rum saved the day. It was the winter of 1890, and Pocock found excitement aplenty off the windswept Pribiloffs when the Adele's boatmen, beaten off by nighttime gunfire, had to haul out in the teeth of an onshore wind that nearly put them on St. Paul's rocks.

Pocock, on his return, gave his adventures full treatment in his Victoria paper, which displeased the Flying Dutchman so much that he waylaid Pocock in an alley one night and there was a lively fistic set-to. The Adele was wrecked the next spring off the Charlottes.

Came again the well-known Pocock malady . . . itchy feet. Quitting his newspaper job he toured the Kootenay mines (and met the quintette who had dubbed themselves the "Noble Five"), then wandered down to the Couer d'Alene mines in Idaho where he did a little commercial photography, ran a cigar stand and finally found himself on a small-town Idaho weekly "where the subscriptions were mostly in bear meat and potatoes."

Finally, out of a job again, this time he reached bottom. In the intense summer heat, he recorded afterwards, the board sidewalk seemed to rise and fall, as the 30-year-old adventurer stumbled along broke and hungry. It was just then that the telegraph operator ran after him down the street.

"Your name Pocock?" he queried.

Pocock nodded.

There was a telegram for him from England. Not only a telegram but $500 with it. A book of western stories he had written had turned out a best seller. Could he return and talk over prospects of another book?

BACK IN ENGLAND he wrote another book, then in 1897 came Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. It was not only a world-wide celebration but perhaps the most colorful bit of pageantry ever staged, in a country noted for its pageantry. Picked detachments of troops from every quarter of the globe assembled in Britain, a vast uniformed brotherhood of every race and color. Among them was a smart detachment from Canada's Northwest Mounted Police and they caught Pocock's eye. He made himself known, and the upshot was he borrowed a police uniform and marched with the contingent.

Maybe it was under the spell of that moment that Pocock envisioned his Legion of Frontiersmen, men who resembled the Northwest Mounted Police in dress and outlook; gentlemen adventurers from the ends of the earth with a common tie.

On the heels of the Jubilee celebrations came electrifying news from Canada's northland: the Klondike gold rush was on!

Which gave Pocock another bright idea; to freight supplies by pack train from the Stikine River to Lake Bennett.

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By CEC

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